

NO MORE BAD FORCE MYTHS: A TACTICAL STUDY OF REGIMENTAL COMBAT IN KOREA

**A MONOGRAPH
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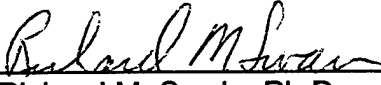
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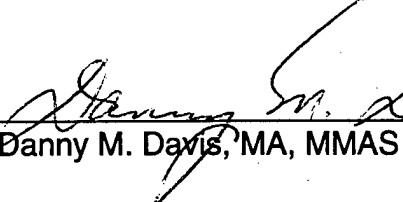
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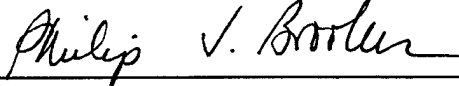
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I. Introduction

*Historically, we have always tended to focus most, if not all, our leadership dialogue, research and doctrine on guys at the bottom of the leadership ladder – sergeants, lieutenants and captains.*¹

Lieutenant Colonel Michael McGee, 1992

The purpose of this monograph is to inquire whether or not the traditional explanation of poor peacetime training and unit readiness is adequate to account for U.S. Army defeats during the first month of the Korean War. General histories of the war, such as those written by Roy Appleman, Clay Blair, and T.R. Fehrenbach, identify poor physical conditioning, lack of combat training, low strength and weak small unit leadership as prevalent in all U.S. Army units. The post-1945 drawdown is identified as the root cause of these shortcomings. The Army's equipment was "old and worn"² and its soldiers were "undertrained, understrength, ill-equipped."³ Roy K. Flint's *Task Force Smith and The 24th Division: Delay and Withdrawal, 5-19 Jul 1950* summarizes the common explanation for the battlefield disasters that summer:

Without exaggerating, it could be said that Eighth Army units were bordering on being unready for war...In the end, the problems encountered during the first battle in Korea came down to training areas, shortages and the distractions of colonial life in Japan.⁴

A similar theme is the focus for T.R. Fehrenbach, who paid homage to the explanation in the subtitle to his 1962 work, *This Kind of War: A Study in Unpreparedness*. Clay Blair, in his detailed history, *The Forgotten War*, devotes the first chapter to a harsh condemnation of the Truman Administration for defense policies that, "all but wrecked the conventional military forces of the United States."⁵ Any general history of the Korean War arrives at a common conclusion in its first few chapters: the US Army sent to Korea in the war's opening months was unprepared for war and, by implication, incapable of fighting effectively.

The focus on unpreparedness as the source of the early disasters during the Korean War became a contemporary concern in the early 1990s. Then-Chief of Staff of the Army General Gordon Sullivan turned the fate of the first infantry unit to fight in Korea into a mantra, "No More Task Force Smiths"⁶ as he attempted damage control in the first years of the post-Cold War force reductions. According to an interview with General Sullivan, and an accompanying article in *Army* magazine, this phrase was:

a reference to the tiny, ill-prepared, and badly equipped force which put up a valiant but futile attempt to halt North Korean hordes...The resolve that history will not repeat itself in this manner is what the general calls the 'bottom line.'⁷

Sullivan's emphasis on the "unprepared and unready" verdict found its way into doctrine. The 1993 edition of Field Manual 100-5 uses the Korean War as an example of "a costly lesson in strategic and military unreadiness"⁸ The Field Manual goes on, "Years of undertraining and neglected weapon development placed Army units in battle against a better-equipped enemy that was superior in numbers."⁹ Thus, the Korean War has become an example to the current force of the negative consequences inherent in ignoring the impact of poor training, poor equipment, and understrength units. Failure in that war is tied directly to the quality and quantity of soldiers, weapons and equipment.

The assertion is remarkably misleading in one respect. "Years of neglect" do not and cannot position units in battle. What decisions by the senior Army leadership in the Far East theater put Task Force Smith on that ridge north of Osan, or the 27th Infantry astride the Poun-Hwanggan road, and what influenced these decisions? If the force was incapable of fighting, then any decisions made were bound to result in failure. If, on the other hand, there is evidence that the units were capable of fighting well, then what does the employment plan for the American units tell us about other reasons for failure?

It is undeniable that the fighting in Korea began badly for the U.S. Army. In numbers of American battle deaths, July, 1950 was the second costliest month of the war's 37 months.¹⁰ Anecdotal evidence of poor soldier performance in combat, inadequate communications, inferior or defective weapons and understrength units during this period abounds.¹¹ The retreat to Pusan is a matter of record. That the infantry regiments were organized with two instead of three battalions, the artillery battalions had two instead of three firing batteries, and the heavy tank companies initially had light tanks that had not fired their main guns in years, all to save money, are not matters of conjecture.¹² Therefore, this paper in no way is intended to dispute the basic assertion that the units were by design understrength, needed better training and suffered from old or ineffective equipment.

Yet these commonly offered reasons for *why* the US units suffered defeat and, in many cases, disintegration, leave critical questions unanswered. Was battlefield defeat inevitable, or highly probable, and, if so, was the corrective largely a matter of funding, training and discipline? If the budget cuts were to blame, then the unreadiness of Eighth Army's units should have been reflected in the combat performance of all nine Japan-based infantry regiments that deployed to Korea between 1-22 July, 1950. To see if this is in fact the case, it is necessary to examine the sequence of the deployment and the fate of the units after each entered combat. Furthermore, it is necessary to inquire about assigned missions, the strength of the opposition, and to examine the operational intent of Lieutenant General Walton Walker, Eighth US Army commander, and General Douglas MacArthur, Commander in Chief, Far East Command.

The regimental echelon is the appropriate level to focus this inquiry. While Eighth Army sent three divisions to Korea in July, 1950, the opening actions for each were fought at the regimental or battalion level. The 24th Infantry Division, first into Korea, did not fight as a

division, that is, with more than one regiment in the action, until the battle at the Kum River line that began on 13 July 1950. Four of its six infantry battalions had fought independent actions in the previous eight days. Both the 25th Infantry Division and the 1st Cavalry Division initially deployed their regiments dispersed along the Eighth Army front. The 1950 version of FM 7-40, *The Infantry Regiment* called for regiments to defend frontages of between 2,400 and 4,800 yards, depending upon terrain.¹³ During the defense of Pusan, regimental frontages would average 10,000 yards. In other words, regiments with only two thirds of their allotted infantry strength were defending over twice their doctrinal frontages. The absence of a third battalion also meant that no regimental commander could constitute a battalion-strength reserve without compromising his ability to fight with more than one battalion at a time.¹⁴

That the regiments were deployed at such variance with their design function raises a second question. It seems critical to ask if the tactical and operational employment of the US Army in Korea during this period was also a major factor in its defeat and disintegration. The impacts of two critical assumptions on the part of the American commanders warrant particular examination. First, the record suggests that the Army's leadership in the Far East, beginning at the top with MacArthur, assumed from the outset that the mere appearance of American soldiers in Korea was stop the North Korean advance. Second, the record also suggests that some American commanders assumed their units would not become efficient in combat until they were "blooded," that is, until they had exchanged and experienced lethal fires with the enemy.¹⁵ The two assumptions appear contradictory; did they, or the contradiction they posed, affect the performance of the US units and, if so, how?

This paper will focus on what happened to the regiments in two of the Eighth Army's three divisions. It will consider the performance of all three of the 24th Infantry Division's

regiments between 5-20 July, or from Task Force Smith's first encounter north of Osan to the brutal stand at Taejon. It is this period in particular that historians have identified the materiel, personnel and training weaknesses as being critical, and have, by extrapolation, extended their importance to other units. Appleman, the Army's official historian of the war, wrote:

There is no reason to suppose that any of the other three occupation divisions in Japan would have done better in Korea than did the U.S. 24th Division in July 1950. When committed to action they showed the same weaknesses.¹⁶

To test not only Appleman's assertion, but the general conclusion that the critical weaknesses identified above lay at the heart of the Army's initial failures in Korea, the paper will then examine the initial performance of two other regiments: the 27th and 35th Infantry Regiments from the 25th Infantry Division. In each case, the paper will examine the regiment's strength, its mission, its command structure, the strength of enemy units opposed to it, and the outcome of its first action or series of actions. The paper excludes a detailed examination of the third regiment in the 25th Division, the 24th Infantry, because the record strongly suggests that, as an all-black unit, it suffered from unique racist and institutional biases in addition to equipment and training shortfalls.¹⁷ Whatever problems the 24th Infantry had to overcome, they also had this unique bias operating against them, and therefore analysis of their actions is not widely applicable to the other units.

As a matter of clarity, throughout this paper American infantry regiments are referred to by their number and heraldic title, "21st Infantry" or "5th Cavalry" for example, and divisions are referred to simply by their number and the word "Division." The exception is the 1st Cavalry Division, which is referred to by its full title to distinguish it from other "1st Divisions" in the narrative. During the Korean War, a regiment supported by other arms, such as artillery, armor and engineers, was called a "regimental combat team" or RCT. The term is not used here in an

effort to minimize the use of acronyms. Infantry regiments are assumed to have their supporting artillery unless otherwise noted, and armor support is identified where appropriate. Battalions are referred to in shorthand, by their number, then the number of their parent regiment: 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry is 1/27, for example. Continuing in this way, A/1/27 refers to Company A, 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry.

The answers that arise from this examination are relevant today. "Readiness" is a sacred word within the force and monthly Unit Status Reports are crafted and sent up the chain of command as testimony to the strength of each commander's faith. The rite has a valid administrative purpose but it also, imperfectly, memorializes the "bad force" of 1950. Poorly trained, shoddily equipped and understrength is a bad way to go to war. Significantly, all of these shortcomings are tied to the availability of money. The Army's institutional memory has neatly placed blame for the opening failures of the Korean War on the defense bureaucracy, which failed to fund the force adequately, and on its smallest units and most junior leaders, that did not perform to the standards expected by the senior leadership. The implication of this line of reasoning is that more money, better training and better discipline, and not, for example, better employment of the force available, would have prevented disaster.

II. Infamous Defeat

*Zeus in his wisdom heard Achilles' prayer.
And he granted half of it. Yes, Patroclus
Would drive the Trojans back from the ships,
But he would not return from battle unharmed.*¹⁸

Homer

Patroclus's death while driving the Trojans back from the Greek ships at Troy seems an appropriate metaphor to describe the fate of the 1,898 Americans killed fighting in front of Pusan

during July, 1950. Sent forward by the Greeks in the armor of a renowned champion, to make the Trojans believe invincible Achilles opposes them, Patroclus repulses the attack and is killed. The first American troops to Korea carried with them the aura of an invincible army, one that had conquered Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan only five years and one post-war drawdown before, and in the fighting before Pusan the mission was to drive the enemy from the ships. The first month of the war hinged on a successful American defense of a port of entry.

The order into action came on short notice, and few of the units had much time to transition from their garrison routine to operating in combat. Eighth Army deployed three of its four divisions to Korea, mostly in regimental increments, in the sequence shown in Table 1. The 24th Division went first, even though it was not rated as the most capable of the divisions, because its garrisons on Kyushu were closest to Korea and the port of Pusan.¹⁹

Table 1. Entry of US Infantry Regiments into Korea²⁰

<u>Unit</u>	<u>Division</u>	<u>Deployed</u>	<u>First Combat</u>	<u>Days Between Deployment and Combat</u>
TF SMITH	24TH ID	1-2 JUL	5 JUL	TWO
34TH INF	24TH ID	2-3 JUL	5-9 JUL	ONE
21ST INF	24TH ID	2-4 JUL	8-12 JUL	THREE
19TH INF	24TH ID	4-5 JUL	12-14 JUL	SIX
27TH INF	25TH ID	9-10 JUL	23-26 JUL	TWELVE
24TH INF	25TH ID	12-13 JUL	22 JUL	FIVE
35TH INF	25TH ID	13-15 JUL	22 JUL	SIX
8TH CAV	1ST CD	18 JUL	22 JUL	THREE
5TH CAV	1ST CD	18 JUL	23 JUL	FOUR
7TH CAV	1ST CD	22 JUL	23 JUL	TWO

The final Eighth Army division, the 7th, did not enter Korea until 15 September 1950, as part of the landing force at Inchon. MacArthur's initial concept called for only the 24th and 25th Divisions to defend Pusan, while the 1st Cavalry Division would execute the amphibious assault at Inchon. The near-destruction of the 24th Division by mid-July forced the commitment of 1st Cavalry Division to the Pusan front and, as a result, the 7th Infantry Division became the Army

contribution to the Inchon landing. The 7th Division's initial operations were amphibious and offensive, and therefore radically different from those of the other three divisions. It is excluded from examination. Likewise, the 1st Cavalry Division is excluded because it took over a battlefield from another American division, the 24th; its initial battles were different than those of the 24th and the 25th, both of which were, in a sense, 'breaking trail' for the rest of the army.

MacArthur's determination to get US troops into Korea quickly resulted in the hasty air movement of Lieutenant Colonel Charles "Brad" Smith's two-company, one-battery task force. The deploying divisions then sent their remaining units by sea. The deployment amounted to the closure in Korea of one American division per week for three weeks, or a total of almost 40,000 soldiers by 22 July.²¹ From the outset, these units had friendly air cover, if not close air support, secure lines of communication into the port of entry, and the use of the host nation rail net. The flow of forces into theater was therefore steady, generally predictable (a typhoon delayed the 7th Cavalry's arrival) and unimpeded. These conditions are not uncommon in the assumptions of current force projection scenarios.

Units from the 24th Infantry Division were the first to enter combat, and their fate provides much of the material for the conclusion that undermanned, underequipped and undertrained units lay at the heart of our initial failures in Korea. The division's mission, as stated in Eighth US Army Operations Order 2, issued on 1 July 1950, was:

Advance at once upon landing with delaying force, in accordance with the situation, to the north by all possible means, contact enemy now advancing south from Seoul towards Suwon and delay his advance.²²

The outcome was painfully straightforward. Between 5 – 20 July, the 24th Infantry Division fought two North Korean Divisions, the 3rd and 4th, and the 107th Tank Regiment. At the conclusion of this period, the division assembled 8,660 of the 15,965 men initially deployed

to Korea.²³ The division's leadership losses included the commander, Major General William Dean, who was captured, one regimental commander killed and a second evacuated for wounds, and two infantry and one artillery battalion commanders killed. The North Koreans advanced 120 kilometers and inflicted a 46% loss rate.

Estimating the North Korean rate of advance is critical to understanding the ordeal of the 24th Division and to drawing conclusions about the combat performance of its subordinate regiments. After capturing Seoul on 30 June, the North Koreans paused to secure the capital and build up a tank force on the south bank of the Han River. Their 3rd and 4th Divisions, along with the 107th Tank Regiment, resumed the advance southward along the west coast of Korea between 1-3 July and broke through the South Korean forces in front of them near Suwon between 3-4 July. The North Korean 4th Division's rate of advance to this point, from its assembly areas north of Seoul, was roughly 30 kilometers in four days, or just over eight kilometers per day. From 5-12 July, this same division advanced roughly 100 kilometers to the Kum River at Konju, overrunning in the process three US infantry units: Task Force Smith, the 1st battalion, 34th Infantry (1/34) and 3rd battalion, 34th Infantry (3/34). Its rate of advance against 24th Infantry Division's delay was therefore *higher*, at 12.5 kilometers per day, than it had been prior to the commitment of US ground forces.²⁴

It is true that the 24th Division was an understrength unit and that it suffered from handicaps to cohesion. During its alert and movement, "fillers" arrived from other units in Japan. This cross-leveling from within Eighth Army resulted in a sharp rise in the division's strength, from 12,197 men on 30 June to 15,965 by 5 July (plus 3,768 or, a 31% increase), when its units entered combat.²⁵ It is unlikely that these fillers achieved effective integration into their new units, given that the time between their reassignment and their first combat action was less

than a week and, in the case of many, a matter of a few days. Many fillers were senior noncommissioned officers or officers sent to replace leaders judged unfit for combat.

Dean's concept was that Task Force Smith would delay the North Koreans north of Osan and that the 34th Infantry would assume the delay at Ansong and Pyongtaek, one battalion per approach (see Map 1). The 21st Infantry, less Task Force Smith, prepared additional positions south of the 34th Infantry, between Chonui and Chochiwon. The division's remaining regiment, the 19th Infantry, assembled around Taegu, to the southeast. Therefore, when Task Force Smith fought on 5 Jul 1950, it was not the only American ground combat unit in Korea. The 24th Division already had two of its three infantry regiments in position with a third assembling. An enemy moving north to south would encounter, in sequence and independently, no more than three single battalion-strength forces before, perhaps, meeting a two-battalion force, the 19th Infantry. In fact, the 24th Division's delay took three sequential forms: the battalion-strength delays forward of the Kum River, July 5-12; a two-regiment defense of the Kum River, July 13-14, and a two-regiment defense of Taejon, July 19-20 by the 19th and 34th Infantry regiments.²⁶

Much of the division's potential fighting power was fragmented. None of the initial battalion-strength deployments was within supporting distance of another and each suffered from confusing command arrangements. Task Force Smith's initial position north of Osan was about 20 kilometers from 1/34's positions north of Pyongtaek. The latter was 15 kilometers from its sister 3/34 at Ansong. Each battalion was out of radio contact with its regimental headquarters and the other battalions. Dean's most capable regiment, by his own estimation and as demonstrated in the early fighting, Colonel Richard Stephen's 21st Infantry, was split into two units over 40 kilometers apart. In turn, Stephen's most capable commander and unit, Smith's 1/21, was split into the two-company, one-battery task force north of Osan, commanded by

Smith, and a two company group, plus fillers intended for 1/21, under Stephen's direct command near Chonui. Colonel Jay Lovless, commanding the 34th Infantry, had vigorously protested the scattering of his unit to Dean on 4 July, but the latter overruled him.²⁷

There were additional complications. Lovless was subordinated to a provisional task force that included his regiment and two battalions of artillery, under the command of the acting division artillery commander, Brigadier General George Barth. The latter was in fact assigned as artillery commander in the 25th Division, but was sent to Korea to fill in for the 24th Division's artillery commander who was on leave in the United States. Barth was not simply acting in Dean's absence, but had command authority over the US troops in the area. This arrangement proved not only confusing but disastrous for Lovless. When Barth issued instructions to Lovless that contradicted Dean's, and Lovless acted on them, he incurred the division commander's wrath and was relieved on 7 July.²⁸ Positioned in this manner, Dean's battalions were not only scattered but unable to communicate with higher and adjacent units except by courier. A clearly understood division commander's intent might have made up for the lack of timely communications. However, the circumstances around Lovless's relief indicate confusion about the division's mission and Dean's intent among his subordinates.

The command structure within the regiments themselves was turbulent during the entire delay. A glance at the changes of command within the 34th Infantry during this period provides insight into the many criticisms of its performance (see Table 2). While it was not the only regiment in Korea to suffer leadership turbulence during this period, the number of reliefs, losses to enemy action, and commanders sent back to Japan as physically unfit was higher here than in any other regiment within the 24th Division. The inefficiency of a command system forced to rely on road-bound couriers between scattered units was therefore compounded by the senior

officers' unfamiliarity with each other and with their soldiers. The rapid change of critical leaders also resulted in senior officers concentrating on immediate problems and junior leader business because they felt the need to act quickly, on the first matters that came up before them.

Table II. Command in the 34th Regiment, July 1950²⁹

a. Regimental Commanders

<u>Name</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Reason for change</u>
COL Jay Lovless	Deployment-7 July	Relieved by MG Dean
COL Robert Martin	7-8 July	Killed
LTC Robert Wadlington	8-16 July	Acting Commander after Martin's death
COL Charles Beauchamp	16 July – onward	Sent from Japan to replace Wadlington

b. Battalion Commanders

1/34 IN

LTC Lawrence Paulus	Deployment – 3 July	Relieved during deployment
LTC Harold Ayres	5 July-onward	Placed in command by MG Dean

3/34 IN

LTC David Smith	5-7 July	Evacuated for exhaustion
MAJ Newton Lantron	7-20 July	Captured
CPT Jack Smith	20 July	Replaced Lantron during Taejon battle

In addition, the regiment lost two staff operations officers to enemy action during this period. Major John Dunn was wounded and captured on 7 July. His successor, Major William McDaniel, who arrived with Colonel Beauchamp, was captured and killed.

Stephen's 21st Infantry had less turbulence among its senior leaders, as both he and Smith remained in command until the following winter, but 3/21 had an experience similar to the battalions of the 34th Infantry. The battalion commander during deployment, Lieutenant Colonel Delbert Pryor, was evacuated as a nonbattle casualty on 10 July after the unit's first combat action. Lieutenant Colonel Cliff Jensen, who took over from Pryor, led a successful counterattack that afternoon but was killed during the almost complete destruction of the

battalion by a North Korean encircling attack the following morning. By 12 July, the 3/21 had only eight officers and 142 men remaining and formed a provisional company in 1/21.³⁰

At the end of the first week of combat, four out of six of the 24th Infantry Division's battalions had experienced defeat. Both Smith and Stephens and their respective halves of the 1/21 are credited with having fought well against the high odds they faced.

For three days, Stephens had delayed the best of the North Korean Army. His was the first impressive American performance in Korea; some...had run, but the majority had fought and died.³¹

By 13 July, the 3/21 had only 64 men available and had lost two battalion commanders. The 34th Infantry's performance already was the focus of criticism and concern. Dean believed that Ayres's 1/34 suffered a breakdown in discipline when ordered to withdraw from its first contact on 6 July and that its parent regiment had shown little desire overall to fight.³² He was even less satisfied with the 34th's other battalion, even though after the action at Chonan on 8 July, the 3/34 could assemble only 175 men.³³

The regiments appear to have been successful in regrouping soldiers and receiving replacements after each of the delaying actions. By 13 July, when the 24th Division prepared to defend along the Kum River with its two remaining effective regiments, the 34th Infantry had 2,020 men, or 39 more than it had entered combat with on 5 July, while the as yet untouched 19th Infantry had 2,276 men.³⁴ The strength of the 34th Infantry is relevant because it indicates a possible source for Dean's judgment that it was not fighting as hard or as well as it might have. Its sister 21st Regiment not only received praise from Dean, but from historians Flint and Appleman, for a comparatively more effective performance between Chonan and the Kum River. In the process the 21st Infantry lost 1,433 men in action; it was reduced to 649 combat effective soldiers by 15 July. The 21st Infantry was so battered that it was unable to participate in the

defense of the Kum River or of Taejon. The 34th Infantry, reviled for allegedly retreating with little or no order and discipline, also escaped the disastrous type of encirclement that destroyed one of two battalions in the 21st. It remained in action, and available for action, from the initial delaying positions at Pyongtaek – Ansong, through the defense of the Kum River, until it was nearly destroyed at Taejon on 20 July, losing 530 of 1,549 available men.³⁵

Dean is quoted as having said he was determined to make the 34th Infantry fight.³⁶ His haste in firing Lovless and replacing him with Colonel Robert Martin, with whom Dean had served in Europe during World War II, was in part motivated by his perception that the leadership in the regiment was not inspiring enough. Martin's instructions to Ayres immediately after he took command seem influenced by Dean's perception:

We are going to fight. The next time we withdraw, we will withdraw 100 yards, and then we are going to stand and fight. We will withdraw another 100 yards when forced to and fight again.³⁷

Ayres, also an experienced combat commander from the European Theater in World War II, thought Martin sounded like Custer.³⁸ Martin died within one day of taking command as he was personally stalking a T34 tank with a rocket launcher, apparently because he felt he had to set a personal example of fighting spirit. Charges of greater or lesser valor, better or worse discipline, in either the 21st or the 34th Infantry regiments appear meaningless in view of the terrible odds each faced in their single-battalion fights. From a purely practical viewpoint, the 34th's precipitous withdrawals left Dean with two regiments to defend the Kum River. Had it suffered in the same manner as the 21st, he would have been reduced to holding that line with only his uncommitted 19th Infantry Regiment, then in division reserve.

Appleman called the Kum River action a "disaster" and there is little gainsaying his judgement. Both the 19th and 34th Infantry regiments attempted to defend the river line with one

battalion forward and one in reserve. In the case of the 34th Infantry, its forward battalion, 3/34, had only two companies. K Company (K/3/34) was sent to Taejon on 13 July, its 40 weary survivors judged more of a liability than a combat asset. The 1/19 defended along a 24 kilometer front. The North Koreans struck the 34th Infantry with the 4th Division, drove it from its positions, and flanked the 19th Infantry with their 3rd Division. They were again able to attack battalions with divisions, as they had north of the river. They could do this because the 24th Division was running out of what little mass it had entered Korea with one week earlier.

The North Korean 4th Division so wrecked the 19th Infantry that it would play only a marginal role in the defense of Taejon three days later. Like the 21st and the 34th, it suffered the loss of key leadership. Its commander, Colonel Guy Meloy, was wounded and evacuated during the fighting on 16 July. The 1/19 commander, Lieutenant Colonel Otho Winstead, assumed command from Meloy and was killed trying to reorganize the defense later that same day. Casualties in the regiment amounted to 50% of the 900 men initially deployed along the river.³⁹ Curiously, the 19th Infantry also escaped the opprobrium heaped on the 34th Infantry by the generals and the historians. Flint states, "The 19th Infantry fought well at the Kum River until it was cut off; then it suffered the same fate [as the 34th did]."⁴⁰ As neither the 19th nor the 21st appear to have delayed or damaged the North Koreans significantly during this period, the major distinction of these two regiments, in comparison with the 34th Infantry, seems to be that their soldiers died in larger numbers.

Some questionable assumptions appear to lie behind these attributions of greater valor or disgrace, better or worse performance. Flint, for example, in assessing the performance of the 34th Infantry, reinforced the unpreparedness argument behind that regiment's failure: "Nowhere were the failures of the prewar Army more evident."⁴¹ Gugeler began his account of the 1/34

delay at Pyongtaek with a quotation from Kipling, "We was rotten 'fore we started-we was never disciplined"⁴² that seems to capture well the essence of the bad force explanation for failure. In assessing the performance of A/1/34 during its initial fight at Pyongtaek on 6 July, one day after Task Force Smith opened the war for the 24th Division, Gugeler wrote:

Company A was not prepared to fight intelligently when it was called upon to do so. The individual actions and reactions -- the failure to differentiate between enemy tank fire coming from the front and supposed short rounds from supporting mortars -- indicate a lack of imaginative and realistic combat training. The inability of the troops to remedy minor weapons malfunctions is further indication of inadequate training.⁴³

The battalion commander, Ayres, has vehemently denied that his unit performed badly during the withdrawal from Pyongtaek.⁴⁴ Gugeler never reconciled his conclusions with Ayres, whom he did not contact during the preparation of his *Combat Actions in Korea*. In fact, Ayres's protestations about impressions that his battalion was worse than the others began as early as 7 July 1950, when he defended 1/34's withdrawal from Pyongtaek to Dean.⁴⁵ It is therefore at least possible that the 34th Infantry's troubled reputation began with Dean's assessment that day, which was based on second-hand and incomplete information.

The arguments for or against the 34th Infantry's poor performance beg the question. What level of performance would have made a difference? Gugeler's focus on comparative trivia like the ability to correct weapon malfunctions, when A/1/34 was facing envelopment and destruction by thousands of North Koreans, as happened to 3/21 five days later, is at best misplaced and at worst irresponsible. It places blame for the failure of the delay on soldiers and weapons and not on the positioning of the battalion by Barth and Dean. Ayres, the battalion commander, faced much the same situation as had Smith the day before and had a high chance of experiencing the same outcome. Barth recognized this at the time, and had warned him,

explicitly, “not to end up like Brad Smith.”⁴⁶ Ayres himself gave the order to withdraw before the enveloping attack of North Korean infantry could close on his position; he recognized that his unit could not delay a force of that size, only die trying.

Five separate single-battalion actions, those of Task Force Smith at Osan, 5 July, 1/34 at Pyongtaek on 6 July, 3/34 at Chonan on 7-8 July, 3/21 at Chonui on 11 July, and the remnants of 1/21 at Chochiwon on 12 July, all resulted in demoralizing retreats and little or no delay to the enemy because the scenario, once established, repeated itself. The 24th Division initiated contact in battalion strength against one enemy infantry division on 5 July. After that, the 24th Division fought two North Korean divisions and a tank regiment with one battalion at a time for seven straight days. In short, none of the regiments, regardless of greater or lesser combat readiness, was capable of rescuing what was from the outset a disposition that placed them and the division as a whole at a hopeless disadvantage.

The proof of this assertion lies in looking past the traditional focus on the deplorable aesthetics of the 24th Division’s first three weeks of fighting. Imagine, for instance, that Task Force Smith somehow lacked its infamous deficiencies. Imagine that it had its full battalion complement of 975 men, was equipped with T34-killing 3.5” bazookas and anti-tank mines, had fully operational mortars, machine guns and field radios and was supported by a six gun battery of 105mm howitzers firing a generous supply of high explosive anti-tank rounds (HEAT). Imagine also that its soldiers were all expert infantrymen, the worst having recently graduated on the Commandant’s List from Fort Benning and that all had trained together on delaying actions for the previous six months. Task Force Smith, in this hypothetical scenario, would be the modern epitome of “readiness.”

Now imagine this force in position south of Suwon on the morning of 5 July, 1950, facing the same 33 T34 tanks of the 107th Tank Regiment and 4,000 infantrymen in two regiments of the North Korean 4th Division, that Smith and his soldiers actually fought.⁴⁷ The “fully ready” Task Force Smith still would face odds of greater than four to one in infantrymen alone. We know that the North Koreans were well trained, highly disciplined and well equipped, so it is unlikely that they would stop advancing, let alone run, in the face of determined American opposition. Reasoned judgement strongly suggests that instead of the actual 185 out of 540 men killed, wounded or missing, this more capable, more resolute TF Smith, if it would stand its ground, would be killed or captured to a man.

What might have happened if TF Smith had been able to stop the tank column north of their defensive position? First, the commander of the 4th Division would have learned ... that there was opposition ahead...Next, the full force of 30 85mm tank guns could have been turned against the...infantry...Third, the enemy commander...could have more quickly deployed his artillery...The combination of direct fire from 30 tanks and the indirect fire of the artillery ...would have devastated the task force...In short, TF Smith may have been totally lost.⁴⁸

That expectation, on the part of Walker and Dean, that each of these single-battalion delays, conducted by TF Smith, 1/34 and 3/34, would either halt the North Koreans or die trying, appears to lie behind the criticism that the 34th Infantry performed poorly. At the time, the justification for 24th Division's one-battalion-at-a-time charge into the teeth of a larger, tank-equipped opponent's advance was that immediate contact was necessary to delay the enemy advance. As we have seen, the enemy was not delayed; his rate of advance increased as General Dean's stock of battalions decreased. In fact, the employment of the US units seems to have been derived less by tactical judgement and more by contempt for the North Korean Army and the belief that they would run when they realized they were fighting American soldiers.⁴⁹ Once

it became obvious that the enemy would not run, the American leadership seems to have concluded that our soldiers were not fighting hard enough to make them do so.

Dean identified the high quality of the North Korean soldiers, and the need for a weapon that could stop their tanks, as early as 8 July. He wrote to MacArthur, "I am convinced that the North Korean Army, the North Korean soldier, and his status of training and quality of equipment have been under-estimated."⁵⁰ He apparently was either unaware of or less concerned with the size of the force that opposed him. While not as overwhelmingly huge as the press reports indicated at the time, the North Koreans did have larger forces and, more importantly, were able to mass them continually against Dean's scattered division.

In its advance to the Kum River, the North Korean 4th Division lost 50% of its strength, or roughly 5,500 men.⁵¹ ROK units fighting the 4th Division between 1-2 July, south of Seoul, delayed its advance 48 hours and inflicted over 2,000 casualties. The remaining 3,500 or so therefore fell to actions by the 24th Division and increasingly effective interdiction by tactical aircraft. In the 3rd Division, which advanced parallel to and east of the 4th, also against the 24th Division, casualties were similarly heavy. While the air attacks undeniably were effective, it is also apparent that ground forces were inflicting casualties on those two divisions. Together, two North Korean divisions at full strength amounted to 22,000 soldiers. Subtract the losses inflicted by the South Korean forces below Seoul between 1-2 July and the figure is an even 20,000. The 105th Tank Brigade contributed one regiment, the 107th, with 40 tanks at full strength, to the advance. The Far East Air Force (FEAF) claimed to have destroyed 38 tanks on 10 July, and beginning with Task Force Smith on 5 July, American infantrymen had been picking them off in small numbers for a week prior to the retreat behind the Kum River. It is unlikely, even given effective battlefield recovery and inflated damage reports by the Air Force, that the 107th Tank

Regiment employed more than 20-25 operational tanks at any time after 10 July. With the exception of Task Force Smith, most American units reported fighting tanks in no greater than company strength throughout this period.

The 24th Division, as noted earlier, had not quite 16,000 soldiers when it entered combat on 5 July. It also had one company of light tanks, A/78th Armor, which first fought on 10 July and, by most accounts, performed poorly. At first glance then, it appears that the arguments about the poor quality of the US force have merit: a single division of 16,000 should have been able to delay two divisions of never more than 20,000 soldiers, supported by 20 or so available tanks, without suffering ruinous casualties. The fact is that "the 24th Division" never fought as a concentrated force of six battalions, three regiments or 16,000 soldiers. Its three regiments did, however, fight separately and often in battalion-sized packets of soldiers. The North Koreans were able to achieve decisive concentrations against single US battalions in every action between Suwon and Taejon.

The 24th Division's exposure in isolated, impotent battalions north of the Kum River has caught the attention of some historians. Blair makes a scathing appraisal of Dean's tactics, as well as Walker's military judgement:

The Americans had achieved little in this piecemeal and disorganized waste of precious lives and equipment. At most, they delayed the NKPA a total of three, possibly four days. Notwithstanding Army claims to the contrary, these delays were not in any way decisive...and might well have been matched at less cost by a consolidated and cohesive defense behind the Kum River.⁵²

The argument is compelling, even if it is made with the benefit of perfect hindsight. Dean's division lying in wait for the North Koreans behind the Kum River, all three regiments intact and within supporting distance of one another, communication wire in place, artillery registered on the north bank and air support on call, arguably would have conducted a far more

effective defense or delay. However, this judgement is not based entirely on hindsight. Commanders within the division, such as Lovless and Ayres in the slighted 34th Infantry, were understandably dismayed when their units were dispersed forward, then ordered to advance into contact against enemy forces that, after 5 July at least, they knew to be superior in numbers and aggressively led.

Appleman, therefore is right, but for the wrong reasons. Any 2/3 strength division scattered through a depth of 100 kilometers in battalion increments and under continuous attack by an aggressive, concentrated enemy, could not be expected to perform better than the 24th Division did. Training weaknesses, understrength units and inferior weapons, especially anti-tank weapons, undoubtedly contributed to the 24th Division's failures. As these defects were much in evidence, it is easy to conclude that they were at the root of the problem. If the 24th Division's failure was inevitable, because of the two-battalion regiments, the light tanks, the broken radios, the ineffective 2.36" rocket launchers and the untrained soldiers, then no tactical scheme would have worked. Massed behind the Kum River, it still might have been outflanked and routed by the North Koreans. On the other hand, if it was the 24th Division's operational handling, and not the quality of its units, that was the primary cause of its destruction, then there would have to be evidence that other Japan-based units accomplished their assigned missions in roughly similar circumstances. The evidence would also have to demonstrate that there were no significant differences in men or materiel between such other units and the 24th Division. Obviously, no units performed so brilliantly that the North Korean attacks were stopped cold; the Pusan Perimeter was not securely held until late August, 1950. However, there is evidence that competent tactical deployment and sound regimental command made all the difference in the fate of the second American division to arrive in Korea.

III. Competence Without Miracles

I simply can't imagine competence as anything save admirable, for it is very rare in this world...and those who have it in some measure, in any art or craft from adultery to zoology, are the only human beings I can think of who will be worth the oil it will take to fry them in Hell.

H.L. Mencken⁵³

Buried near the bottom of page 581 in Blair's 1,136 page history, *The Forgotten War*, is a muted tribute: "[Major General William Kean] ran a good division. Its 27th and 35th regiments had never suffered a major setback."⁵⁴ As Blair's history, or any history of the Korean War, is replete with accounts of major setbacks for the Army units involved, this is high praise. General Kean's regiments began arriving on 10 July, as the 21st Infantry was in the midst of its ordeal between Chonui and Chochiwon. All three were assembled in Korea by July 15, or just after the loss of the Kum River line. General Walker has been criticized for holding the 25th Division out of the fight while the 24th Division was pummeled at Taejon, but it did not have that much time to wait between deploying and fighting. One of its regiments, the 24th Infantry, was sent into combat with roughly the same haste as those in the 24th Division. Its elements arrived between 12-13 July and E/2/24 was in combat by 16 July, near Sangju, with company-sized elements of North Korean infantry supported by tanks in platoon strength.⁵⁵ Furthermore, the 25th Division would not inherit the 24th Division's terrain or its opponents.

It is apparent from the 25th Division's orientation and disposition between 15-20 July that General Walker intended it to block North Korean advances from the north and northwest (see map 2). In other words, there is strong evidence to support the assessment that the 25th Division couldn't have helped the 24th Division because, by the time the former had arrived, Eighth Army had identified additional threats coming from new directions. Regardless, it was Dean, the overall American ground commander in Korea until 13 July, who directed that the 25th Division

guard the northern avenues of approach as opposed to coming to his aid around Taejon.⁵⁶ As a result, the division kept its three regiments disposed in a triangle north of Taegu for six days, with each regiment separated from the other two by about 70 kilometers. The 24th Infantry was at Kumchon, the 27th Infantry at Andong and the 35th Infantry in reserve at Yongchon (with the division command post).

Like the 24th Division, the 25th Division's initial combat action was a single battalion fight. On 20 July, General Walker ordered General Kean to deploy north of and protect Sangju, a major road junction in mountainous central Korea. The 24th Infantry led off with a reinforced battalion movement to contact against at least company-strength North Korean forces that resulted in the temporary recapturing of Yechon in central Korea on 21 July. This action was very different from the experience of the units in the 24th Division, in particular because the North Korean units in Yechon lacked tank support. However, the attack at Yechon was a success if for no other reason than, for the first time in Korea, a battalion had accomplished the mission assigned it.

The 24th Infantry, the strongest American regiment in Korea, with three battalions of infantry supported by three batteries of artillery, and the first to achieve an unqualified tactical success, could not uphold this opening standard of performance. Its subsequent breakdown in combat, and eventual disbandment, has been attributed to racial biases and the low caliber of white officers assigned to its all-black units.⁵⁷ Of all the regiments that fought in Korea, it alone was the subject of a detailed Center for Military History study, *Black Soldier, White Army*, and the details of the controversy surrounding its performance lie outside the scope of this paper. However, two facts stand out that warrant inclusion. First, the record indicates that at the very least the 24th Infantry performed no worse than its all-white counterparts. The struggle by

veterans and historians over the years to correct what was initially a very negative and inaccurate account is similar to what has occurred with the record of the 34th Infantry (which also was disbanded for poor performance). Second, the record clearly shows that the 24th Infantry shared with the other two regiments in the 25th Division the pattern of tactical success in its first combat.

Upon its movement forward from the initial triangular deployment north of Taegu the 25th Division brought all three regiments into line and oriented its front northwest, with the 27th Infantry in the south, the 24th Infantry in the center, and the 35th Infantry the farthest north. The movement, initiated on 20 July, was in response to a four division advance by the North Koreans that threatened to bypass a line General Walker was trying to stabilize east of Taejon with the newly arrived 1st Cavalry Division. Over the next ten days the three regiments of the division experienced a gradual crescendo in combat intensity as the North Koreans struck first the 24th Infantry in the center, then the 35th in the north and then the 27th in the south. Lieutenant Colonel John H. Michaelis and his 27th Infantry fought an opening action of particular significance because there, for the first time in Korea, an American regiment fought as a unit, accomplished its mission and maintained its combat effectiveness.⁵⁸

The 27th Infantry moved into position behind the South Korean 2nd Division, which conducted a rearward passage of lines on the evening of 23 July. After probing forward with a platoon-sized patrol and making contact with North Korean tanks and infantry, Lieutenant Colonel Gilbert Check's 1/27 prepared to receive an attack the following morning. Between 0630 and 1930, his battalion repelled a series of almost continuous infantry attacks that the North Koreans supported with about one company of tanks. Timely air strikes destroyed three of the tanks and although the remainder penetrated 1/27's positions, aggressive tank hunting with 3.5" rocket launchers disabled them all by the close of the day.

To prevent the expected North Korean envelopment of 1/27, Michaelis ordered it to withdraw that night through 2/27, which was positioned on high ground about a kilometer and a half to the rear. As a result, 2/27 caught two North Korean battalions in the open the following morning, as they attempted to flank 1/27's old positions, and inflicted high casualties on them with direct and indirect fires. After regrouping, the North Koreans continued their attacks and, at 2200 on 25 July, the 27th pulled back, under heavy pressure, to higher ground near Hwanggan. North Korean attacks continued through July 28 and, at dawn on July 29, the 27th Infantry withdrew to the south through the 1st Cavalry Division, on its left.

For five days, an American infantry regiment, supported by eight 105mm howitzers, nine light tanks and, periodically, attack aircraft, had delayed a North Korean division supported by tanks and artillery over a distance of 20 kilometers. Appleman states that, in exchange for 323 American casualties, the North Korean 2nd Division "suffered heavily during this time, some estimates placing its loss above 3,000 men."⁵⁹ Attacked by superior numbers, the 27th Infantry "bit back with unusual, even unprecedented, ferocity."⁶⁰ When it withdrew through the 1st Cavalry on July 29, it was "intact and ready to fight on"⁶¹ and then began its role as General Walker's mobile reserve, outside of 25th Division control.

Kean's northernmost regiment, Colonel Hank Fisher's 35th Infantry, also received an attack during this period. Fisher had only one battalion, his 2/35, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel John Wilkin. The other battalion, 1/35, under Lieutenant Colonel Bernard Teeter, was in division reserve. Under Fisher's strong protests, the 25th Division assistant commander, Brigadier General Vennard Wilson, directed that he detach one company from his already reduced regiment and position it inside the lines of the South Korean unit tied in with the 35th Infantry's right flank.⁶² The result was predictable: a North Korean probing attack drove the

South Koreans off, flanked F/2/35 and broke its cohesion in a matter of hours on 22 July. Despite these initial handicaps, 2/35 skillfully executed a series of delays over the next week, falling back almost 50 kilometers under pressure from the North Koreans. During their initial contact with North Korean tanks on 23 July, 2/35 stood its ground while accurate fire from the division's one 155mm howitzer battalion and air strikes dispatched the tanks, then it repelled an infantry attack. Fisher's other battalion, 1/35, entered the fight on 25 July. Kean committed it to the right of the 27th Infantry as its flanks came under heavy pressure from continuous attacks by the North Korean 2nd Division. After securing the 27th Infantry's flank and assisting its withdrawal in good order, the 1/35 moved behind the 24th Infantry, successfully covering its withdrawal near Sanju in the last days of July.

None of the combat actions, beginning with the 24th Infantry's recapture of Yechon and ending with 1/35's covering missions near Hwanggan and Sanju, was an extraordinary event. Yet these unquestionably are examples of competent, effective employment of the available units. Struck by three enemy divisions on as many avenues of approach, the 25th Division delayed them, inflicted punishing casualties on at least one (the 2nd) and withdrew in good order. That the 25th Division was able to maintain its fighting integrity after its first week of combat is evidenced by its subsequent actions that began on 1 August. In response to a North Korean flanking movement along the south coast, the division disengaged from its fight around Hwanggan and Sanju, shifted 150 miles in 36 hours, and successfully held the extreme left of General Walker's line of American and South Korean divisions defending Pusan. What had made the 25th Division's opening fights so different from those of the 24th Division?

There is little evidence to support an assumption that the former had fewer handicaps in terms of command turbulence, unit strength or equipment readiness, than the latter. There was

unwise interference from within the division's senior command structure. Wilson's costly repositioning of F/2/35 on 22 July was very similar to Barth's confusing instructions to Ayres and 1/34 near Pyongtaek on 5-6 July. Two of the 25th Division's regiments, the 27th and the 35th, were two-battalion hybrids like all of those in the 24th Division. Equipment on hand was often in poor condition. The 27th Infantry suffered from shortages of medical equipment and ammunition for its rifles and mortars during this period. It is likely that similar problems existed in the other infantry units.⁶³

As was the case in the 24th Division, there were rapid changes in leadership during the alert and deployment to Korea in some of the 25th Division's regiments. Colonel John Childs was considered too old to lead a regiment in the field. He was moved from command of the 27th Infantry and reassigned as the 25th Division chief of staff before it arrived in Korea. His replacement, Michaelis, was at the time the youngest regimental commander in Korea and met his command for the first time as it arrived on the docks in Pusan. In addition, Ayres left from 2/27 to assume command of 1/34 during the transfer of replacements to 24th Division in early July. His replacement, Lieutenant Colonel Gordon Murch, had therefore been in command only a little longer than Michaelis when the 27th Infantry went into combat for the first time.

Despite these changes, the command structure within the 25th Division was more effective than that in the 24th Division. With all three regiments on line, Kean maintained a viable reserve, 1/35, and committed it with good effect on two occasions to assist two different regiments in withdrawing under heavy pressure. There is no record in Appleman's very thorough account of the 24th Division's first three weeks that any of its battalions or regiments received support from a division-directed maneuver by another infantry unit. The positioning of the division's heaviest artillery to support Fisher's reduced 35th Infantry in the far north indicated

sound tactical judgement by compensating for the loss of one battalion in that regiment needed to build a division reserve. Although Wilson's intervention in Fisher's tactics cost F/2/35 heavily, there are fewer reported instances of senior officers directing operations below their echelon than in the 24th Division. For example, no senior officers in the 25th Division personally hunted T34 tanks with bazookas as had Martin, who was killed, and Dean, who was captured, as a result of doing exactly that. The 25th Division appears to have coordinated its air support better; both 1/27 and 2/35 got timely air strikes on enemy tanks attacking their positions during their opening actions. While these factors did not produce an unquestionably superior force that could stop the North Koreans cold, they did ensure that the 25th Division remained an effective combat formation even against long odds.

The 25th Division had two strong regimental commanders as well. Only Colonel Horton White, commanding the 24th Infantry, was not highly regarded, and the contrast between his ability and that of Michaelis and Fisher did not escape the notice of historians researching reasons for the 24th Infantry's controversial performance.

Colonels Michaelis and Fisher had enormous combat experience and knew how to prepare men for battle. The commander of an airborne regiment at Normandy ...Michaelis had received a battlefield promotion...Reduced to the rank of lieutenant colonel in the drawdown that followed the war, he was still one of the Army's brightest stars...Fisher was perhaps even more accomplished. Commander of the 317th Infantry regiment of the 80th Division...he had come ashore following the Normandy invasion and had led his unit through ten months of the war's most vicious fighting.⁶⁴

As personalities, Michaelis and Fisher were opposites. Michaelis, described as young, handsome and aggressive, was the public affairs ideal of a combat commander, and he actively sought the media limelight. After its opening success in the delay near Hwanggan, the 27th Infantry and its glamorous commander "became overnight celebrities."⁶⁵ Fisher was more reserved and did not promote himself. Perhaps as a result, his unit's accomplishments are less

visible in many accounts of the war. Still, both men made lasting impressions within their units. One of Fisher's lieutenants believed that, "because [he] had trained us in a tough, demanding, professional manner, we won battles in Korea from the beginning."⁶⁶ Similarly, a platoon leader in Michaelis's regiment wrote, "[He] was a hard-charger, an aggressive, tenacious fighter, with great initiative...He made sound decisions and did not panic in a crisis."⁶⁷ Both Fisher and Michaelis benefited from stable internal command structures. Once committed to action, no battalion commanders were lost to relief, wounds or death as had happened to at least one battalion in each of the 24th Division's regiments in its first three weeks of combat.

It does not appear that the North Koreans hit the 25th Division any less hard between 20 – 31 July than they had the 24th Division from 5-20 July. Four enemy divisions, supported by one regiment of tanks, advanced against the 25th Division during this period. Between the 24th Infantry, air interdiction and the South Korean forces around Sanju, the North Korean 15th Division was reduced to half strength, or 5,000 men.⁶⁸ Air attack reduced the North Korean 1st Division to about 3,000 men and it was withdrawn from the advance. The 13th Division was delayed, but not seriously damaged, by 2/35. The 2nd Division, committed down the Poun-Hwanggan road against the 27th Infantry, suffered heavily, losing over 600 men a day for five days. Due to the fact that the 24th Division was fighting in Taejon at the same time the 25th Division was going into action, it is unlikely that the latter had time to assimilate lessons learned from the former's brief and bloody experience fighting the North Koreans. According to a 27th Infantry staff officer, tactical intelligence about the North Koreans prior to the regiment's first action was at best "minimal."⁶⁹

To some extent, the 25th Division's regiments benefited from the terrain in their opening battles. The Central Korean area they operated in is more mountainous than the coastal corridor

where Task Force Smith, the 34th and 21st Infantry regiments conducted their delays. The 27th Infantry, in particular, exploited the tactical possibilities of the successive ridges running perpendicular to the enemy's axis of attack in their delay between Sangyong-ni and Hwanggan. However, the terrain also isolated units and broke up the mutually supporting fires necessary for an outnumbered unit to repel an attacker. One platoon leader in the 27th Infantry at Sangyong-ni described this problem.

The front assigned our understrength battalion was almost a regimental front, by the textbook...I was given a 300 yard front to cover with my 28 man platoon (authorized 40). I sent a patrol across to the 2nd Battalion and found that they had pulled farther away than I had been told. This was because of being understrength ...We mutually agreed to patrol the gap area every hour. Somehow, the plan didn't work, and during the night I bent my flank squad around for better protection.⁷⁰

In light of conditions like these, and given that the 25th Division's operations did not benefit from a major urban obstacle, such as Taejon, or a linear obstacle like the Kum River, as the 24th Division's did, it cannot be said that the former was favored by better terrain for its operations than the latter. Neither division had the road net or communications capability that its senior leaders were used to operating with during World War II in Europe.

Therefore, the 25th Division appears to have had no significant external advantages over its counterpart 24th Division when it entered combat. Two of its infantry regiments were the same type of two-battalion hybrids found in the 24th Division. What units it did have were understrength, many as the result of having sent soldiers to reinforce the 24th Division when it deployed. Its infantry, artillery and tank units had the same weapons as in the 24th and suffered from the same shortages of spare parts and ammunition. All of its regiments, like those in the 24th Division, operated on extended frontages against enemy divisions that were supported by companies or battalions of armor.

It also is unlikely that the 25th Division and its regiments were somehow better, or more experienced, man for man, or leader for leader, than those in the 24th Division. The commanding generals, Dean and Kean, were both veterans of World War II. The former commanded the 44th Division in combat during the closing stages of the campaign in Northwest Europe and the latter was Chief of Staff for the First US Army from the landing at Normandy through the German surrender. Therefore, Kean, unlike Dean, was commanding his first division when sent to Korea. Dean appears to have been the more personable of the two. He was well known in Japan for his dislike of the normal pageantry associated with flag officer rank. The Japanese called him *Aruku Shoko*, or “Walking General,” and Blair described him as “a simple, down-to-earth soldier.”⁷¹ Kean, on the other hand, earned the nickname “Captain Bligh” from General Omar Bradley during their service together and Russell Weigley stated he was “the key figure in the somewhat unhappy First Army Headquarters.”⁷²

One significant difference between the two generals lies in their execution of the art of battle command. Dean, undeniably brave and aggressive, never really had control of his division. Task Force Smith went to the Osan position on instructions from Brigadier General John Church, commanding the military advisor group in Korea, and then received additional guidance from Barth, who was with them as late as the morning of 5 July. After this came the confusion between Barth, Lovless and Dean regarding Dean’s intent along the Pyongtaek-Ansong line that resulted in Lovless’s relief. Barth also emplaced Stephen’s 21st Infantry, less Task Force Smith, at Chonan on 4 July, apparently without coordinating this with either Dean or Lovless.⁷³ The narrative evidence available suggests that Dean was quick to blame the 34th Infantry for retreating from odds no better than those that had broken Task Force Smith, and that he devoted much of his effort to make that regiment “fight.” As an example, his decision to

extend the battle at Taejon an extra twenty-four hours seems motivated largely by his intent "to stimulate the fighting spirit of the 34th Infantry."⁷⁴

Fighting the North Koreans appears to have become more personal for Dean as his division grew smaller, and his tank hunt, which led to a series of events resulting in his capture, can be interpreted as an attempt at redemption through sacrifice. His colleague Colonel Martin, who was in Korea at Dean's personal request, had died doing as much on 8 July. Dean is known to have been highly critical of about his own performance, saying he would not have awarded himself a wooden star for what he accomplished between 5-20 July 1950.⁷⁵

As Dean was drawn closer and closer to the frontline fight, mentally and physically, what were other control organs in the division doing? The 24th Division staff was no combat multiplier. Michaelis, who was not kind when observing failure, described Dean's headquarters as, "a horrifying picture. They were getting whipped everywhere they turned. Everything seemed to be chaotic."⁷⁶ The division chief of staff is described elsewhere as a "drunk" and a "weak spot."⁷⁷ With the commanding general personally involved in the fight, these were serious weaknesses indeed. Overall, the problem appears to have been one of organization, not necessarily one resulting from the quality of individual officers. The division was only days away from a comfortable, peacetime routine, and, more significantly, was receiving a constant flow of changing orders and situation reports. The inability to conduct realistic staff training exercises, a problem common to the 25th Division in Japan as well, certainly must have hurt the division's performance.

At the regimental level, the 24th Division was easily as strong in leaders as the 25th Division. Colonel Meloy in the 19th Infantry had been Chief of Staff of the 103rd Division in the closing months of World War II and, of the three regimental commanders who led the 24th

Division to Korea he was the only one who later attained four star rank. Colonel Stephens, in the 21st Infantry, was another European veteran of World War II as a division Chief of Staff, having served in the highly regarded 30th Division. For Colonel Lovless in the 34th Infantry, Korea was his second combat tour as a regimental commander; he had commanded the 23rd Infantry throughout the campaign in Northwest Europe. Battalion commanders Red Ayres and Brad Smith were both World War II combat veterans, the former as a 31-year old battalion commander in Europe and the latter as a company commander in the Pacific.⁷⁸

None of the 24th Division's regimental commanders, or any other in Japan for that matter, was so poorly regarded, by his contemporaries and his soldiers, as the 25th Division's Horton White, who commanded the 24th Infantry.⁷⁹ As noted earlier, Fisher in the 35th Infantry was a respected, highly capable veteran commander even though he was considered overage. Michaelis in the 27th Infantry had an amazing combat career behind him already, in which he commanded an airborne regiment at Normandy and was Chief of Staff of the 101st Airborne Division at Bastogne, when he assumed command on 10 July. Like Meloy, he went on to achieve four star rank. Still, with one man brand new, one very weak and the other considered old, the 25th Division's quality at the regimental command level might appear, in absolute terms, lower than that of the 24th Division.

It is true that before the war the 24th Division was rated lowest in combat readiness among the four Japan-based divisions. The 25th Division was only slightly better at 72% vice 65% "ready." These figures reflect the garrison posture of the divisions, prior to the 24th Division receiving fill from the other three, and as Major General Almond, MacArthur's Chief of Staff at Far East Command, rated the entire Eighth Army as only 40% combat ready, all of these ratings appear arbitrary and, ultimately, meaningless.⁸⁰

There is little difference in the status of training in the two divisions prior to the war. Flint notes that the 34th Infantry failed its Army Training Test in the spring of 1950 while both of the 21st Infantry's battalions passed.⁸¹ Yet the 2/27, which fought in the most successful first battle of the war among all the regiments in the two divisions, under a brand new battalion commander and a brand new regimental commander, also failed its test that spring.⁸² Part of the problem, common to all of the Eighth Army units, was that realistic training was difficult in Japan. A 1/27 platoon leader wrote,

The small size of the post did not allow us room to do tactical training, and close-in training areas were at a premium. Once or twice a week we would take a one-hour train ride to a training area with barely enough room for squad training, and the troops grew tired of running the same small piece of terrain over and over.⁸³

One questionable assertion noted earlier, made by Blair and Fehrenbach, among others, is that the units in Japan suffered from low pride and little unit cohesion. As Flint makes clear in the case of the 21st Infantry, the senior leaders,

imparted through their company commanders and senior noncommissioned officers an esprit that developed into an especially strong cohesiveness, a quality that distinguished the Gimlets [the regimental nickname] from some other regiments when the fighting began in Korea.⁸⁴

The 21st Infantry was not the only highly cohesive regiment in Eighth Army. The 19th Infantry was highly regarded as the famous "Rock of Chickamauga" regiment. In the 27th Infantry, famous as "the Wolfhounds," ensured that its new officers and sergeants learned that life revolved around the regiment and its traditions, which included their rivalry with Fisher's 35th Infantry, "the Cacti:"

As I look back, and compare that period of time with time served in other troop units, to include almost four years in the 82nd Airborne Division, I would say that we had great esprit in the Wolfhounds. I now attend the annual reunions of the 25th Division Association. and hear 70+ year-old men blow bugles and yell "WOLFHOUSES!" answered by a yet louder "CACTI! ", answered again and

again by each group, louder each time. Which tells me that some of that demonstrated esprit was consummated in early peacetime service, when units are *competitive with each other* and not necessarily in combat when units are *cooperative*.⁸⁵ [emphasis in original]

In contrast to the claim that the soldiers in 1950 were unaware they were in the Army to fight, Stephens wrote that, in addition to comradeship, the men in his regiment fought out of “pride in our profession.”⁸⁶ Certainly, there were examples of poor battlefield discipline and shameful behavior in the face of the enemy. The 34th Infantry’s operations officer, Major John Dunn, was captured after witnessing a larger force of American infantry withdraw in front of a North Korean patrol, abandoning its wounded. Stephens also personally had to rally fleeing soldiers from his own regiment on several occasions between Chonui and Chochiwon.

As both division commanders committed their units on extended frontages, the conduct of the actual fighting in July was handled at the regimental echelon, or below. The contrast between the fate of Stephen’s 21st Infantry, arguably the best of Dean’s regiments in the 24th Division, and that of Michaelis’s 27th Infantry, Kean’s and for that matter, Walker’s, finest regiment, is instructive in assessing whether or not it was the handicaps of the post-1945 drawdown that produced so many defeats in Korea. Both had high cohesion and esprit before the war. Both were well led at the regimental and battalion level. Both suffered from the lack of a third battalion, inadequate training in Japan, and poor equipment.

As noted earlier, Stephen’s regiment began the war in three polyglot groups: Task Force Smith, Pryor’s 3/21, and 1/21’s two remaining companies, plus some replacement personnel, under Stephen’s direct command. Smith fought two days after arriving, Stephens and Pryor within four. Not until 12 July, one week after his first action, did Smith get his entire battalion back under his command. By that time, 3/21 was hardly more than a company in strength and

the 21st Infantry had no effective combat power. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that a fine regiment had been squandered.

Michaelis and the 27th Infantry, on the other hand, entered Korea eleven days before their first real fight. Like the 21st Infantry, the 27th fought a North Korea division along a major avenue of approach for a period of several days. Both were praised for their fighting power. Both Stephens and Michaelis received great attention in the media for their battlefield accomplishments. Yet upon withdrawal, Stephen's regiment was wrecked and Michaelis's was still cohesive and, more importantly, able to move to another fight and win an important action within three days.

Between Stephens and Michaelis one sharp contrast stands. Just after his regiment crossed the Kum River, Stephens told war correspondent Marguerite Higgins, "No American division is any damn good until after its first fight. These kids'll be okay after awhile."⁸⁷ Michaelis, in the relative comfort of an interview made after he left Korea, believed just the opposite was true:

Then, since I knew that the making of an outfit more than anything else depends on how it stands up in its first serious contact with the enemy, I became obsessed with the importance of winning this first battle.⁸⁸

Michaelis's belief is borne out to some extent by both his and Stephen's experience in World War II. The 30th Infantry Division and 101st Airborne Division established their standards of tactical success from the outset in Normandy, which was for both units their first combat action. The 27th Infantry's first fight in Korea unquestionably lay behind his statement, however. With typical hyperbole, Michaelis went on, "at Sangyong-ni, a great regiment was born."⁸⁹ The evidence suggests soldiers who predated him in the 27th Infantry believed it was a great regiment before his arrival, but Michaelis had a point. His troops were desperately inexperienced, as were

Stephens's. During an interview with a reporter from the Saturday Evening Post shortly after the 27th Infantry moved south to the coast at Masan in early August, Michaelis was interrupted by a gunshot that turned out to have been one of his soldiers accidentally killing himself while cleaning his pistol.⁹⁰ Ironically, he had been giving a strong statement about the poor level of training and readiness in the Army prior to the war when the incident occurred. Yet Michaelis in this interview either did not understand or chose not to address a larger reason for his success and the initial failures of other regiments.

Unquestionably, his aggressive handling of the 27th Infantry had blunted the North Korean 2nd Division's initial attack; the massing of fires from 2/27, the supporting artillery battalion and tank company, in the engagement area on 25 July was in particular very effective. Unlike all the other infantry actions up to this point, the Americans retained the initiative in the fight at Sangyong-ni. Check's 1/27 conducted aggressive reconnaissance upon occupying its first positions, located and fixed the enemy's probes, and fought a successful defense against tanks and infantry the following day. Frustrated but not made helpless by the tactical inflexibility of the two battalion structure, Michaelis kept his battalions within one night's foot movement of one another, and withdrew one through the overwatching fires of the other. None of these moves was flawless, and the regiment's casualties were high, but the end result was 3,000 casualties in the North Korean 2nd Division and an American regiment still capable of fighting.

Yet the key to this well-handled action was that the 27th Infantry had not fought Sangyong-ni alone. Michaelis made the quality of his communications systems a high priority when he took over the regiment, and two of his links were crucial: to his supporting field artillery battalion and to the close air support jets.⁹¹ Furthermore, his intact withdrawal was supported by two other infantry units. The 1/35, committed from the division reserve, had provided timely

support on his right flank as Michaelis withdrew to Hwanggan and his route south was covered by units from the 1st Cavalry Division. When Stephen's positions were flanked at Chonui and Chochiwon, there was no American unit within miles to help him. Nor was there a reserve constituted that could have moved to his aid, or a division headquarters capable of executing such a move. The salient feature of these first actions in Korea is how alone the understrength American units were. One Task Force Smith veteran recalled, "We kept saying to ourselves 'Well, here we are and we've been here a month, and where the hell is the rest of the Army?'"⁹² Ayres, interviewed during the withdrawal from Chonan, said to a reporter,

Have you heard anything more about American troops arriving? I was just kind of wondering if any more Americans were coming, and if they were, whether we'd be still around to see them.⁹³

While both the 21st and 34th Infantry had some 105mm and 155mm batteries in support of their delays, most of the communications wire was expended in the first positions. By the time it had withdrawn to Chochiwon, the 21st Infantry's observers found it difficult to call targets to the fire direction centers. Air support, while available, was less timely and, on at least one occasion, attacked Stephen's troops instead of the North Koreans.

Michaelis succeeded, in other words, not only because of his aggressive employment of the 27th Infantry, which undoubtedly was successful and stands as an under-appreciated example of the combat power latent in Eighth Army's infantry regiments, but also because his tactical problems, while enormous, initially were within his capability to solve. When those problems threatened to exceed his capabilities, in the last days of the withdrawal through Hwanggan, outside solutions were available. His regiment, no matter how well handled, did not have the power to stop a North Korean division on its own. If a regiment as well handled, and as well-deployed as the 27th Infantry was between Sangyong-ni and Hwanggan could not stop a North

Korean division, then Dean's expectations on behalf of his single-battalion blocking positions in 24th Division's area were badly conceived.

The final argument that the 24th Division's destruction was brought on by the low quality of its force therefore rests on the assumption that these isolated actions, which doomed Stephens and the 21st Infantry, bought time for the arrival of the 25th Division and the 1st Cavalry, so that Michaelis and others could fight better supported. The single battalion delays were unavoidable, in this view, and because the units themselves were of such low quality, they could not be effective in executing those delays. British historian Max Hastings, in one of his typical jibes at the fighting power of American infantrymen, wrote

Neither MacArthur nor his subordinates could reasonably have expected the scanty American forces...to halt the Communist invasion. But well-handled regimental combat teams could have hit and run...then pulled back to the next obstacle suitable for defense. In reality, American officers seem to have had neither will nor skill...⁹⁴

This is the least supportable of any of the assumptions common to the histories and the current published Army doctrine, concerning the Korean War because, from the outset, the employment of American forces was based on crucial miscalculations about the nature of the enemy. The need for an effective delaying action became apparent only after it was obvious that the gamble of scattered battalions had failed.

IV. Arrogance and Contempt

*"It was as if," thought Mr. Britling, "David had flung his pebble – and missed!"*⁹⁵

The deployment from Japan brought one division to Korea each week for three weeks (Table 1), for a total of 19 infantry battalions. Eighth Army calculated that 34 battalions were needed to hold along the Naktong River and east to the Sea of Japan, or, along what became known as the Pusan Perimeter. The full strength 2nd Division was en route from Fort Lewis,

Washington, with nine battalions; the remaining six would come from the 5th Regimental Combat Team, en route from Hawaii, and a brigade of Marines. The reinforcements from outside Japan arrived in Korea between 31 Jul and 19 August. Walker's concept, outlined to Army Chief of Staff J. Lawton Collins on 12 July, was to "get in behind that river without losing anybody [and] with what's coming, I can do pretty well."⁹⁶ Walker believed he needed three divisions to delay, then defend, in front of Pusan so that the reinforcements could arrive and give him a solid defense.

When the 24th Division's last regiment, the 19th Infantry, entered Korea on 5 July, the next regiment to arrive, the 27th Infantry, with two battalions, was five days away. During those next five days, three of the six battalions already in Korea were rendered combat ineffective (1/21, 3/21 and 3/34), for a net loss of one available battalion over this period. By the time the last of the 25th Division's regiments, the 35th Infantry, had closed in Pusan on 15 July, the total of combat ineffective battalions had risen to five, after the fight at the Kum River, and by 20 July all six battalions in the 24th Division were ruined. Therefore, when Walker assumed command of the ground battle in Korea on 13 July, his stock of available infantry battalions was *falling* even as more divisions deployed from Japan.

The fact that the North Korean rate of advance was rising during the 24th Division's delay further casts doubt on the necessity of its piecemeal employment. To reach Taegu, where the South Koreans had established a provisional capital after the fall of Seoul, from Osan before 15 July, when a second American division would have been available in Korea, the North Koreans needed to advance over 20 kilometers per day. While such rates of advance are possible, even over mountainous terrain and on foot, which is how most of the North Korean infantry was moving, it seems unlikely that they would have reached the Naktong River before the better part

of the thirteen battalions available between the 24th and 25th Divisions could have been deployed together against them. Regardless, it is obvious that the decision to commit the 24th Division unsupported and in battalion increments meant that MacArthur was sacrificing one division to get two into Korea. This clearly placed Walker in an untenable position, when his own calculations showed him that he needed at least three to delay in front of Pusan long enough for the balance of his forces to arrive.⁹⁷

These calculations, by themselves, imply that Eighth Army fully understood what was needed to stop the North Koreans. However, the initial employment of the 24th Division, and the criticism of the American units' performance that continued after Taejon, was more influenced by assumptions than calculations. Just as Dean had plenty of uncoordinated assistance in the deployment of his division, from Barth and Church, notably, Walker had to fight the "wildly optimistic" Far East Command, and MacArthur himself, who continued to press for an immediate landing at Inchon. The 1st Cavalry Division was diverted from this mission to the front at Pusan after the Kum River battle. The 2nd Infantry Division and the Marine Brigade were diverted from Inchon to the Pusan Perimeter while en route to Korea following the battle at Taejon. These rapid changes in mission have resulted from MacArthur's determination to take the offensive at the earliest possible moment. In his initial estimate on 30 June, MacArthur informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the total requirement for Korea, to include units for a counteroffensive, would be only two divisions.⁹⁸

MacArthur's three-phase strategy to counter the invasion consisted of (1) delaying actions necessitating the rapid, if piecemeal, commitment of the first of his divisions from Japan; (2) establishment of a holding line above Pusan after the introduction of other Far East Command forces and the revitalization of the remaining ROK units; and (3) a dual counteroffensive, by amphibious landing far behind the enemy lines and by overland assault from the perimeter north of Pusan⁹⁹

MacArthur's strategy in effect doomed the 24th Division to a piecemeal employment in front of the North Koreans. "MacArthur did not hold the [North Korean Army] in high regard; on the contrary, he was contemptuous of it."¹⁰⁰ This initial disregard for the enemy's combat power is remarkable; when MacArthur drafted his 30 June estimate to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the only Koreans he had witnessed running from the battle at that point were from the South. The decision to sacrifice one of only ten divisions in the entire Army in 1950 appears mind-boggling 47 years later, but its origins lay in the assumption that the North Koreans would not fight once they encountered American soldiers. Walker's pilot, Eugene M. Lynch, who later rose to the rank of brigadier general, characterized the attitude of the American leadership at the outset of the war this way:

They always talked about the last weeks of the war [WWII]; how we ran roughshod over everybody. These guys thought, 'Boy, this will be a piece of cake.'" ¹⁰¹

Some commanders lacked this optimism at the outset and fully understood the dangers of abandoning military sense for wild notions of moral ascendancy. At the 24th Division command post in Taejon, Lovless forcefully protested the dispersal of his regiment to Dean before Task Force Smith had fired a shot. Fisher bitterly opposed Wilson over the fragmented employment of his regiment that resulted in the rout of F/2/35. Walker, once on the ground in Taegu, aggressively sought any unit he could get for the defense of his perimeter, and quickly earned the enmity of MacArthur and his staff in Tokyo for his alleged negative attitude. Each commander seems to have criticized the man below him for a growing perception that the American soldiers were not fighting well. In the model that, upon contact, one army would flee, American soldiers assumed the characteristics of the "rabble of...young soldiers ...who were ill-trained and lacked combat capability"¹⁰² previously ascribed to the North Koreans. The contempt MacArthur and

others had reserved for the army of a minor Asian power turned into highly emotional derogatory comments about the fighting power of American soldiers.

Yet the model itself was flawed; neither side “quit” and each had considerable combat power. The North Korean 3rd and 4th Divisions lost at least 50% of their fighting strength between Osan and Taejon and the North Korean 2nd Division suffered over 30% casualties in its opening combat with the 27th Infantry alone. While the losses in front of the 24th Division can be attributed in large part to effective air strikes, the demonstrated combat power of the 27th Infantry, among others, indicates that, properly employed, the American units were easily a match for their North Korean opponents. The resilience of the 25th Division in the face of a broad front attack, during which it suffered over 1,000 battle casualties in its first week (the 24th Division is estimated to have incurred 1,500 in its first week of fighting) clearly demonstrates that the forces deployed from Japan were capable of effective combat operations.¹⁰³ Walker and others stated that they were disappointed with the 25th Division’s performance because it had not stopped the North Korean advance. It appears Walker was disappointed that his soldiers could not produce miracles routinely.

The “bad force” argument would have us believe that no units performed well, that, as Appleman stated in his summary of 24th Division’s ordeal, all American units displayed the same weaknesses. This is true to some extent but also irrelevant. This paper’s examination of the 21st and 27th Infantry regiments has shown that, in terms of physical conditioning, equipment readiness, combat training, strength and leadership, they suffered from similar readiness handicaps. The ruining of Stephen’s fine 21st Infantry between Osan and the Kum River stands in sharp contrast with the fate of Michaelis’s 27th Infantry. Battlefield defeat for the American units was not inevitable; it resulted from grossly exaggerated assumptions about the enemy’s

unwillingness to fight and the flawed employment of what strength they did have that resulted from these assumptions.

Which is not to say that these forces were in any way ideally trained, equipped or manned, or that the Eighth Army in 1950 presents an acceptable standard of readiness for the American Army. The point is simply that those shortcomings did not lie behind the ignominious retreat to the Pusan Perimeter and that no amount of extravagance in funding, rigor in training or zealousness in the pursuit of discipline would have reversed the outcome. It was not the North Korean Army that shattered the admittedly brittle 24th Division; MacArthur, and Dean, executing MacArthur's concept, accomplished that for them at least twenty-four hours before Task Force Smith began its forty year march into the Army's institutional memory as a metaphor for unreadiness. The ordeal of the 24th Division and General Dean is immortalized and offered up to us as an example of good men and gallant leadership lost due to inadequate defense budgets. The historical myopia extends even to veterans attempting to tell the story of the war to a national audience. Dean gets a separate entry in Harry Summer's detailed *Korean War Almanac*, so do the battle of Taejon and Task Force Smith. Starchy General Kean has no entry is not even mentioned as commanding general of the 25th Division.¹⁰⁴ To focus on the evidence of "unreadiness" in Korea, and ignore evidence of success achieved with the same caliber of soldiers creates distortions. It places the burden for the 24th Division's terrible casualties and agonizing retreat onto the shoulders of privates, sergeants and captains or posits a solution in the development and procurement of weapon systems. In good faith we have said to those same ranks in today's Army that we will train better, build full strength units and field high quality equipment in order to ensure that the disasters of 1950 do not occur again. All of these are perfectly valid objectives, even if they do seem derived from blatantly obvious conclusions.

The danger lies in not understanding why the Army initially failed in Korea. By implication, the "bad force myth" says, if those soldiers had been in full strength units that were better equipped and better trained, the Korean War would not have opened with a series of disasters for the American Army. This paper has sought to demonstrate that this was not so, that the defeats resulted from the willful assumption that the Army would not have to fight at all, and that its few units need not have been deployed properly at the outset. The regiments sent to Korea did suffer uniformly, or nearly so, from the general unreadiness of the force in 1950. However, the reasons for failure point up the chain of command, not down, and are derived not from failures to train, man or equip the force. When these same type units were deployed to solve manageable tactical problems, they performed competently. The 25th Division fought well, in circumstances not markedly different than those of the 24th Division. Michaelis and the 27th Infantry in particular set a very high standard, but Fisher's 35th Infantry also accomplished its missions competently and was able to maintain its combat power for immediate, subsequent operations. While Michaelis's professed approach to fighting the first battle may have been an important variable in the 27th Infantry's success and the 21st Infantry's destruction, it seems more likely that the positioning of his regiment, between two other American units that could assist him quickly enough to prevent its destruction, ultimately made the difference between the slaughter at Chonui-Chochiwon and the stout delay at Sangyong-ni.

The "bad force myth" is inadequate to account for the battlefield failures in July, 1950. Looking past the first month of the war, it is evident that the maldeployment of American units continued to plague the Army in Korea. The isolation and destruction of Task Force MacLean, later Task Force Faith, east of the Chosin Reservoir in November, 1950, where single battalions again faced an enemy division, this time the Chinese 80th, almost six months after the war began,

points to a pattern of unrealistic expectations on the part of the American senior commanders about the capabilities of their soldiers.¹⁰⁵ It is erroneous to assume that even properly equipped, boldly led and highly trained soldiers can accomplish miracles, or that failure to employ them properly will result in anything other than their well equipped defeat and disintegration. Furthermore, it is wrong to immortalize the forlorn hopes of July, 1950 by attributing their defeats to a failure of the bureaucratic process to properly man, equip and train them. These defeats resulted from trained professionals in senior leadership positions making decisions based on arrogant assumptions and a failure to understand their own forces or those of the enemy.

End Notes

¹ Michael McGee, "The Fundamental Disconnection in Army's Leadership Assessments," *Army*, (June 1992): 18.

² Roy E. Appleman, *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu* (Washington, D.C.: United States Army Center of Military History, 1986), 113.

³ Clay Blair, *The Forgotten War* (New York: Times Books, 1987; Anchor Books 1989), 7.

⁴ Roy K. Flint, "Task Force Smith and the 24th Division," in *America's First Battles*, ed. Charles E. Heller and William A. Stofft (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 274.

⁵ Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 29.

⁶ Gordon R. Sullivan, "No More Task Force Smiths," interview by L. James Binder, *Army*, (January 1992): 18.

⁷ "Dealing With Change in America's Army," *Army* (January, 1992): 21.

⁸ U.S. Army, *Field Manual 100-5, Operations* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993), 3-8

⁹ *Ibid.*, 3-9.

¹⁰ Frank A. Reister, *Battle Casualties and Medical Statistics of the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1986), 108.

¹¹ In addition to Blair, *The Forgotten War*, chap. 4-6, see Rudy Tomedi, *No Bugles, No Drums, an Oral History of the Korean War* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1994) and chap. 1-3, and Russell A. Gugeler, *Combat Actions in Korea* (U.S. Army Center for Military History), chap. 1.

¹² William G. Robertson, *Counterattack on the Naktong, 1950* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Command and General Staff College, 1985), 4.

¹³ U.S. Army, *Field Manual 7-40, The Infantry Regiment* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1950), p 234-37; quoted in William T. Bowers, William M. Hammond and George L. MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier, White Army* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1996), 129, n.9.

¹⁴ Flint, "Task Force Smith and the 24th Division," 273. Flint cites this as an observation from an anonymous officer in the 24th Division that appears in a letter to the Chief of Military History, 5 Aug 1950. The author, familiar with analyzing the combat capabilities of three-battalion regiments in the Soviet Army of the 1980s, believes the problem was not only doctrinal, but should have been obvious before any of the US regiments entered combat.

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- ¹⁵ See 36, below.
- ¹⁶ Appleman, *South to the Nakdong, North to the Yalu*, 180.
- ¹⁷ Roy K. Flint, forward to Bowers, Hammond and MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier, White Army*.
- ¹⁸ Homer, *Iliad*, 16: 258-61, trans. Stanley Lombardo (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 312.
- ¹⁹ For the combat readiness ratings of the four Eighth Army divisions, see page 33, below. For a discussion on the deployment sequence see Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 88-89.
- ²⁰ Three sources provided chronological material for this table: Appleman, *South to the Nakdong, North to the Yalu*, chap. VI-XII, Blair, *The Forgotten War*, chap. 4-6, and Bowers, Hammond and MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier, White Army*, chap. 4.
- ²¹ Eighth U.S. Army, Korea War Diary, Prologue, 25 Jun –12 Jul 1950, ii, vi; quoted in Appleman, *South to the Nakdong, North to the Yalu*, 50, note 2. The calculation of “nearly 40,000” is mine, derived from the strength returns of the three divisions from 30 Jun 1950 cited in Appleman’s work. As the increase in the 24th Division’s deployment strength came from the other three divisions, the aggregate total of soldiers would not have been affected.
- ²² Appleman, *South to the Nakdong, North to the Yalu*, 55.
- ²³ Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 141.
- ²⁴ North Korean movements are recorded in Appleman, *South to the Nakdong, North to the Yalu*, chap. V-VII, *passim*. The math is the author’s.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 50, note 2, and 58. The math is the author’s.
- ²⁶ Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 96-97 details not only the 24th Division’s initial dispositions, but General Dean’s intent. Much of this material is also available in Appleman, *South to the Nakdong, North to the Yalu*, chap. VI. Blair’s discussion includes interviews and material not available to Appleman.
- ²⁷ Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 99-100.
- ²⁸ Uzal W. Ent, *Fighting on the Brink: The Defense of the Pusan Perimeter* (Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing Company, 1996), 43. Ent’s book includes the text of the 24th Division order giving Barth command authority over Lovless. Previous historians have stated Barth was acting outside his authority by positioning Lovless’s units.
- ²⁹ Sources for this table include Blair, *The Forgotten War*, chap. 4-5, Flint, “Task Force Smith and the 24th Division,” *passim*, and Appleman, *South to the Nakdong, North to the Yalu*, chap. VII-XI. Both Flint and Blair appear to use Appleman for chronological information; Blair’s

discussion of the causes for the noncombat-related changes is more thorough. In addition, Ent, *Fighting on the Brink: The Defense of the Pusan Perimeter*, 75 discusses Captain Smith's assumption of command in 3/34 and his subsequent actions.

³⁰ Appleman, *South to the Naktong, North the Yalu*, 98-99.

³¹ T.R. Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War* (New York: Macmillan, 1963; Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 1994), 87. Flint, "Task Force Smith and the 24th Division," 298-299, also praises the 21st Infantry's performance.

³² Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 106 – 108.

³³ Appleman, *South to the Naktong, North the Yalu*, 88.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 122.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 179.

³⁶ Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 38.

³⁷ Ent, *Fighting on the Brink: The Defense of the Pusan Perimeter*, 51.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Appleman, *South to the Naktong, North the Yalu*, 130-145.

⁴⁰ Flint, "Task Force Smith and the 24th Division," 299.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 298.

⁴² Russell A. Gugeler, *Combat Actions in Korea*, [book on-line]. (Washington, D.C.: United States Army Center of Military History, 1970, 1987, accessed 11 August, 1997); available from <http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/catalog/korea.htm>; Internet, 1.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴⁴ Ent, *Fighting on the Brink: The Defense of the Pusan Perimeter*, 46-47.

⁴⁵ Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 107.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 105.

⁴⁷ Ent, *Fighting on the Brink: The Defense of the Pusan Perimeter*, 39.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴⁹ Appleman, *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu*, 118.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 119.

⁵¹ Ibid., 122.

⁵² Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 115.

⁵³ Henry Louis Mencken, in Jon Winokur, ed., *The Portable Curmudgeon* (New York: New American Library, 1987), 27.

⁵⁴ Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 581.

⁵⁵ Ent, *Fighting on the Brink: The Defense of the Pusan Perimeter*, 88.

⁵⁶ Flint, "Task Force Smith and the 24th Division," 290.

⁵⁷ Bowers, Hammond and MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier, White Army*, 263-270.

⁵⁸ The most detailed account of the 27th Infantry's opening action is in Ent, *Fighting on the Brink: The Defense of the Pusan Perimeter*, 94-98. Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 160-161, covers the first two days of the battle. Ent fought in the battle as a platoon leader in the 27th Infantry. Most of the account presented in this paper is drawn from his book.

⁵⁹ Appleman, *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu*, 203.

⁶⁰ Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 160.

⁶¹ Ibid., 161.

⁶² Ent, *Fighting on the Brink: The Defense of the Pusan Perimeter*, 90.

⁶³ Ibid., 95.

⁶⁴ Bowers, Hammond and MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier, White Army*, 74-75.

⁶⁵ Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 161.

⁶⁶ Obituary, Colonel Henry Fisher, *West Point Assembly*, March, 1985; quoted in Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 154.

⁶⁷ Ent, *Fighting on the Brink: The Defense of the Pusan Perimeter*, 60.

⁶⁸ Appleman, *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu*, 195.

⁶⁹ Frank U. Roquemore, San Antonio TX, letter to the author, 21 October 1997. Colonel (Ret.) Roquemore served on the staff of the 27th Infantry as assistant operations officer in 1950.

⁷⁰ Robert W. Hill, 12 October 1997, electronic mail message to the author. Colonel (Ret.) Hill served as a platoon leader in C/1/27 during the action at Sangyong-ni.

⁷¹ Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 91.

⁷² Russell F. Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1981), 460.

⁷³ Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 101.

⁷⁴ Appleman, *South to the Nakdong, North to the Yalu*, 181.

⁷⁵ Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War*, 100.

⁷⁶ Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 146.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁷⁸ Blair, *The Forgotten War*, is by far the most comprehensive published source on the backgrounds of the American tactical commanders in Korea. All of the material in this paragraph is drawn from his research on Meloy, Stephens, Lovless, Ayres and Smith.

⁷⁹ Bowers, Hammond and MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier, White Army*, 62-63 and 73-75 discuss White's leadership and reputation.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁸¹ Flint, "Task Force Smith and the 24th Division," 274.

⁸² Bowers, Hammond and MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier, White Army*, 63-64.

⁸³ Hill, 12 October 1997 electronic mail to the author.

⁸⁴ Flint, "Task Force Smith and the 24th Division," 271.

⁸⁵ Hill, 12 October 1997 electronic mail to the author.

⁸⁶ Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 113.

⁸⁷ Marguerite Higgins, *War in Korea, The Report of a Woman Combat Correspondent* (Garden City, NY: Country Life Press, 1951), 105.

⁸⁸ John H. Michaelis and Bill Davidson, "This We Learned in Korea," *Collier's*, 18 August 1951, 38.

⁸⁹ Michaelis and Davidson, "This We Learned in Korea," 39.

⁹⁰ Harold H. Martin, "The Colonel Saved the Day," *The Saturday Evening Post*, 9 September 1950, 33. This is an overwrought magazine article written during the early months of the Korean War, but it does provide insight into Michaelis's problems when he assumed command. These problems are corroborated in his 1951 article for *Collier's* that he co-wrote with Bill Davidson.

⁹¹ Michaelis and Davidson, "This We Learned in Korea," 38.

⁹² Max Hastings, *The Korean War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), 78.

⁹³ Higgins, *War in Korea*, 87.

⁹⁴ Hastings, *The Korean War*, 78-79.

⁹⁵ Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Guns of August* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1962; 25th Anniversary Edition, 1988), 388.

⁹⁶ Ent, *Fighting on the Brink: The Defense of the Pusan Perimeter*, 58. The facts concerning Walker's estimates, as well as the movement of other units from the United States, used in this paper are taken from Ent.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ D. Clayton James, *The Years of MacArthur, Volume III, Triumph and Disaster* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), 430.

⁹⁹ James, *The Years of MacArthur, Vol. III*, 434.

¹⁰⁰ Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 78.

¹⁰¹ Ent, *Fighting on the Brink: The Defense of the Pusan Perimeter*, 32.

¹⁰² Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 99.

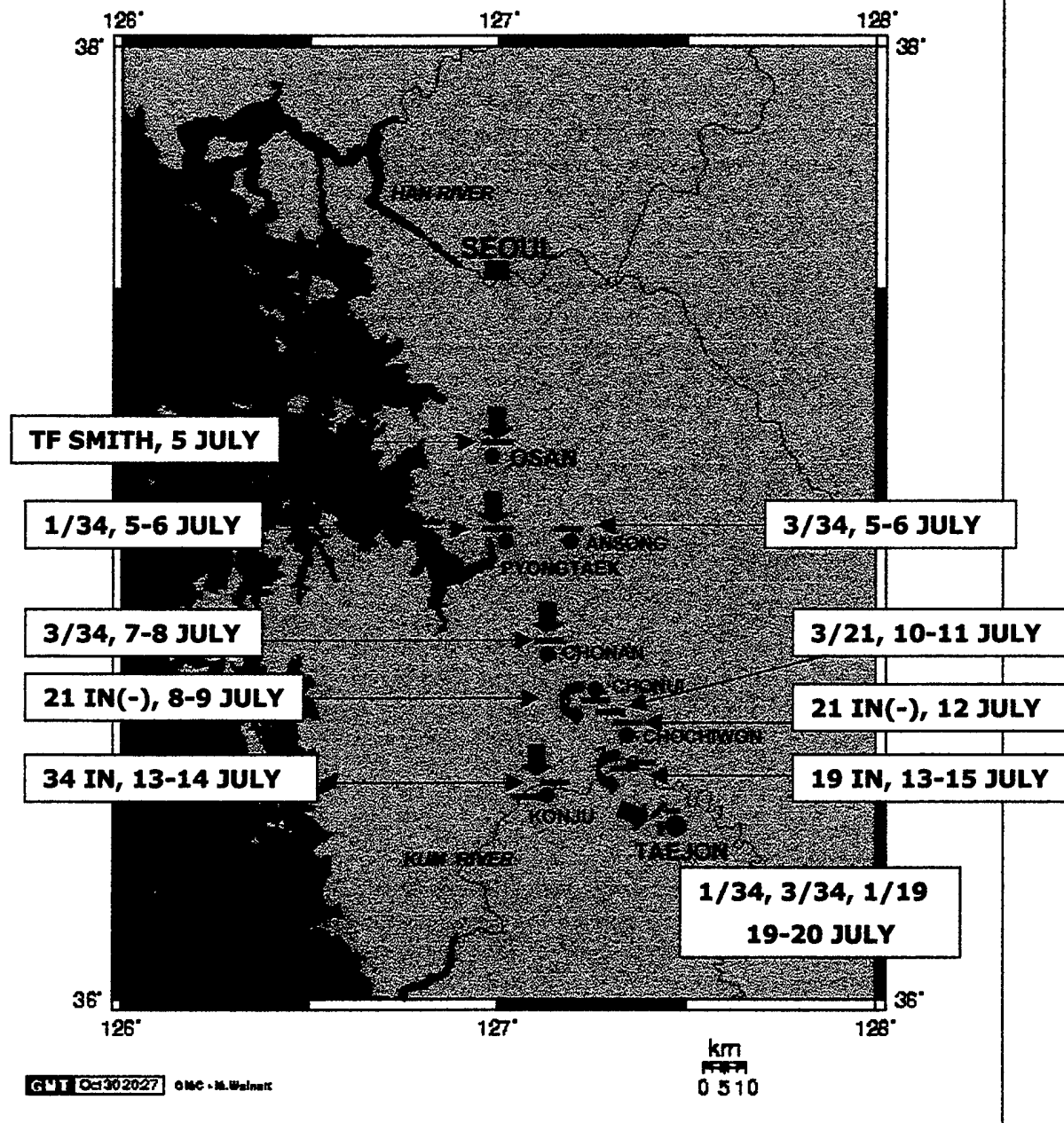
¹⁰³ Appleman, *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu*, 122, for 24th Division's casualties, and Bowers, Hammond and MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier, White Army*, 121-122 for 25th Division's casualties.

¹⁰⁴ Harry Summers, *Korean War Almanac* (New York: Facts on File, 1990), 98.

¹⁰⁵ See Roy Appleman, *East of Chosin: Entrapment and Breakout in Korea* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M Press, 1987).

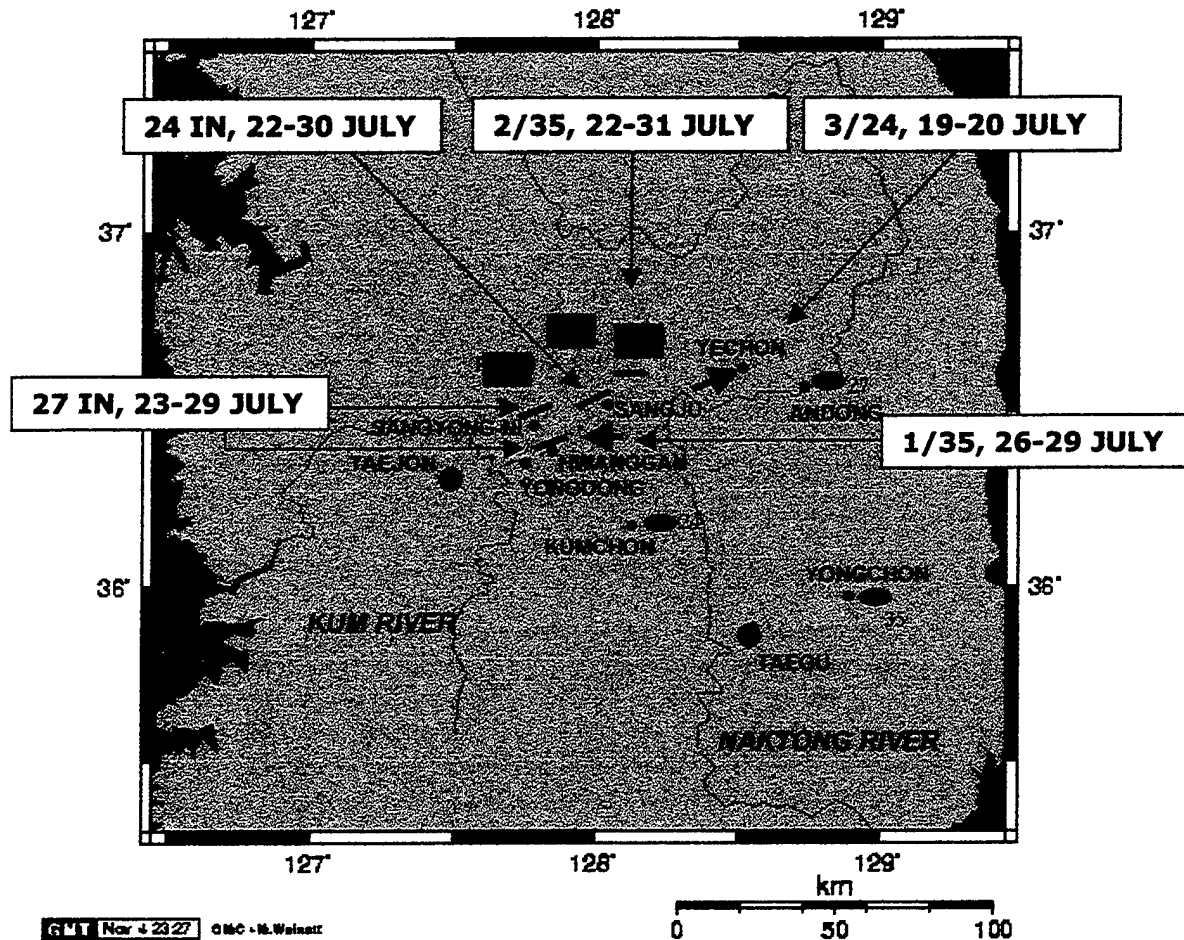
MAP 1. 24TH DIVISION DELAY, 5-20 JULY 1950

— US BATTALION
 NORTH KOREAN DIVISION



MAP 2. 25TH DIVISION DELAY, 19-31 JULY 1950

- ➔ BATTALION MOVEMENT
- BATTALION DELAY
- REGIMENTAL ASSEMBLY AREA
- NORTH KOREAN DIVISION



1ST CAVALRY DIVISION ASSUMED THE DELAY FROM 24TH DIVISION ON 22 JULY IN THE VICINITY OF YONGDONG, ORIENTED WEST AGAINST THE NORTH KOREAN 3RD AND 4TH DIVISIONS

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